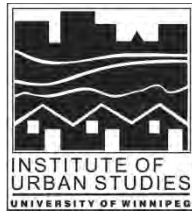


The Best Laid Plans Oft Go Astray: The Case of Winnipeg

by Dr. Lloyd Axworthy
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The Institute of Urban Studies





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THE BEST LAID PLANS OFT GO ASTRAY:

The Case of Winnipeg

by

Lloyd Axworthy

INTRODUCTION

The call for urban reform has been heard with great frequency in Canada over the last six or seven years. Of more consequence is the fact that some reform has actually occurred.

Mind you, there has not been the earth-shattering upheavals in the urban class structure as desired by some vociferous, socialist critics of the city.¹ Nor has there been the ascension of direct control by the people as seen by certain urban romantics.² But there have been a number of important changes in the political systems of our cities - new political alignments, a range of new issues, some change in public attitudes, alterations in government organization, and new policies and programs.

1. See J. Lorimer, The Real World of City Politics, James, Lewis, Samuels, Toronto, 1971.

2. See Boyce Richardson, The Future of Canadian Cities, New Press, Toronto, 1972.

The time is at hand, therefore, to ask questions about these reforms. What has been occurring? How effective have they been? What are the consequences? Our reading of the history of earlier urban reform movements should show us just how inexact an art or science reform can be, with good intentions oft go astray and ending up with unwelcome results.³ So to assay what has been happening to various reform efforts in Canadian cities thus far may provide some correctional guidance for the future.

REFORM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WINNIPEG

One of the major currents of reform and one that is generally wide accepted by politicians and administrators who normally are not enthusiastic about the topic of reform, is the re-organization of local government. One must pay tribute to the generation of political scientists and public administrators who over the past two or three decades have flogged the notion that cities have outgrown their traditional boundaries, and that regional government is the only way to achieve effective delivery of services and good planning. Their message has been received

3. For an interesting view of the earlier urban reform movements see Paul Rutherford ed., Saving the Canadian City, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1974.

mainly by provincial decision-makers, for there is nary a province of Canada that has not embarked upon some form of re-organizing and restructuring of local government. It has become almost a compulsory act of membership in the provincial club to pay homage at least to the need for restructuring municipal institutions.

Perhaps the most significant initiative yet taken in this area of reform has been the new City of Winnipeg Act that came into effect on January 1, 1972. While the original scheme was substantially amended by the Manitoba legislature in 1977, Winnipeg's Unicity has been heralded , and rightly so, as one of the most innovative efforts at local government reorganization in Canada, if not North America. The reason for such attention stems from the fact that this reorganization was aimed not only at providing a more effective form of urban regional government, but it also sought to decentralize the operation of government and give more access to the people. In short, it was designed to centralize and democratize at the same time; to combine the traditional concerns about fragmentation and lack of comprehensive planning with the newer fashion of trying to make the city more democratic.

The Winnipeg case is a useful one to examine therefore, because it represents one of the very best examples of one distinct

area of reform thinking - namely, that the way to achieve improvements in cities is to change their form of government. If the problem is bad housing, poor transportation, burdensome taxation, non-involvement of citizens, then the way to change is to provide new structures, organization and administration. It is assumed that the institution of government is the determining variable in affecting the outcome for cities, as opposed to looking at the political process or the economic and social structure of urban society. The soundness of this assumption will therefore be tested in this particular treatment of the reform of Winnipeg's city government.

PRESSURE FOR CHANGE

During the 1960's, Winnipeg had undergone a frustrating experience with a Metropolitan form of government. Some success had been achieved in the building of public works and transportation; but the hallmark of Winnipeg's Metro government was a consistent internecine warfare between the Mayor and Council of the City of Winnipeg and the councillors and administrators of the Metro Corporation. When Metro released a plan for downtown improvement, city fathers from Winnipeg would soon announce their own pet schemes.

Fortunately, Winnipeg during this period was relatively slow growing and did not noticeably suffer under the political stalemate other than creating a backlog of unattended inner city social problems. The Provincial Government under Premier Duff Roblin, however, was under some pressure to cope with the situation from the media, and, one might assume, building development interests which found it difficult to gain approval on development plans. Therefore the province in 1966 established a Boundary Commission which was to look into problems of Winnipeg's local government. The Commission took its time and, in 1969 before it had reported, the Provincial Government changed hands. Ed Schreyer and the New Democrats came to power with reform of local government as one of their campaign pledges.⁴

Entrusted with the job of developing a plan to fulfill their campaign pledge was Finance Minister Saul Cherniak, a former Metro Councillor who was known to favour the idea of total amalgamation. These pro-amalgamation views were shared by Sidney Green, a strong man in the Cabinet and also a former Metro Councillor. Arrayed against these two powerful ministers of Education, who were former suburban local politicians and

4. For a detailed history of this period of preparation for the new Act, see Thomas Axworthy, The Politics of Innovation - Future City Series Number 2, Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, 1972.

against amalgamation. Therefore within the NDP Cabinet itself were the makings of conflict and ultimate compromise.

An equally potent political factor was the incumbent Mayor of Winnipeg at the time, Steve Juba, an outspoken foe of any kind of federation. Juba was not to be taken lightly. He was a very popular mayor and enjoyed a strong following amongst the working class voters. Therefore, any proposal would have to take due note of Mr. Juba's position.

Rather than relying upon a Tory-appointed Commission, the new government sought architects for a local government blueprint from Toronto. Meyer Brownstone, a Toronto political scientist and former Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs in the Douglas government of Saskatchewan was the chief designer and he employed other Toronto-based consultants to help. In a remarkably short period of time they produced a government White Paper⁵ which set forward what appeared to be an ingenious and creative solution to both the institutional problems and political realities of the Winnipeg situation.

5. See Proposals for Urban Reorganization in the Greater Winnipeg Area, Government of Manitoba, December, 1970.

WHITE PAPER PROPOSAL

At the centre of the provincial proposals was the total unification of Winnipeg. There was to be one council, one administrative structure, and one tax base. This would presumably eliminate problems of fragmentation in decision-making, competition between municipalities for industry, inequities in property tax rates, and allow for a comprehensive management of urban growth.

To consolidate this trend toward unification, the White Paper proposed a highly centralized administrative system. Council would have three standing committees: Finance, Public Works, and Environment, and a central coordinating committee called Executive Policy Committee whose membership included the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Committee Chairman, and three councillors at large. This was paralleled on the administration's side by three departments, of Finance, Public Works, and Environment, each headed by a Commissioner and a Chief Commissioner all of whom together comprised a Board of Commissioners. The lynch pin to this system was the Mayor who was to be elected by a majority on Council and would function as a chairman of the E.P.C. and and ad hoc members of the Board of Commissioners. A cabinet style system was the obvious thought in these propositions wherein the Mayor, depending upon the confidence of a majority

on Council, would have to shape programmes and policies in the E.P.C. and Board of Commissioners that would deserve such support and thereby provide the basis for a policy-making process.

The electoral base for this unified system was to be 48 (later 50) wards, each electing a single councillor. The purpose here was to insure that through the smaller wards (a population base of approximately 10,000) the voter would be able to maintain close touch with his or her elected representative. As well, the small wards would provide opportunity for various minority groups especially those in the inner city, to elect someone who would reflect their interests - something that did not happen in the previous electoral arrangement of large multiple-member wards. In the old system, voting strength resided in those middle class areas of the large wards and there was normally a higher voting turnout than in the lower-class areas. The language of the White Paper indicated a hope that this would lead to a greater sensitivity at the city level to problems of the inner city poor.

To appease the suburban and counter criticisms over centralization, the new system was to be organized into Community Committees. Each Community Committee was to be made up of three to four councillors and was to have power of local supervision and be the arena of first hearing for zoning and planning initiatives. The

boundaries of the Community Committees were coterminous with the old municipalities, except that the old City of Winnipeg was broken into five Community Committee areas.

As a further gesture towards notions of local control and accountability, there was to be a Resident Advisory Group in each Community Committee area. Each year citizens were to elect Resident Advisers who were to meet at least monthly with councillors, receive pertinent information and tender ~~their advice on~~ matters of local concern. This system of Resident Advisers was put forward on institutional guarantee that private citizens would have a say in local government and provide for a sensible degree of local control.

Taken altogether, the proposals for reorganization sought to achieve 1) a more equitable sharing of the tax burden; 2) a unified system of planning to deal with region-wide issues; 3) a centralized system of executive decision-making and service delivery to achieve greater efficiencies; 4) an electoral system that would provide the opportunity for a greater range and variety of representation, particularly from heretofore ignored minority groups; 5) a degree of decentralization in the supervision of the administrative system; and, 6) an opportunity for involvement of private citizens in local government. In

addition to those goals, the Act also contained a number of interesting measures to be used in dealing with planning and development issues. For example, there was a requirement for environmental impact statements on major public works, an elaborate system of public hearings on zoning issues and provision for development of district plans and action area plans. In all, the White Paper proposal rightly deserved the credit for being a major step in institutional reform on the local level.

IMPLEMENTATION

Considering that it was such a major departure, the period of debate and implementation was remarkably short. The White Paper was introduced in December of 1970, and by early summer of 1971 it was passed into law. The elections for the new Council took place in the fall of the same year and the new unified system came into being on January 1, 1972.⁶

Opposition to the scheme was of the expected variety but quite tame and ineffective. Critics, primarily suburban politicians, said it would be very costly and destroy the accountability and "grass roots" accessibility of local government.

6. The speed of this should be contrasted with the British system where it took several years. See, Joyce Long, Alan Norton Setting up New Authorities, Charles Knight and Co., London, 1972.

Public meetings were held throughout those cities where Provincial Cabinet Ministers met those criticisms head on. The media were generally in favour; so were business interests and of course, Mayor Juba, with one exception. Mayor Juba did not like the idea of having the Mayor elected from Council and strongly argued for direct election. This view was strongly supported by the public.⁷ When the legislation came up for third and final reading, the government introduced an amendment allowing for direct election of the mayor for the first term. This change undid one of the important features of the original scheme, namely the idea of a Cabinet style executive. The change had marked repercussions on the operation of the new system.

THE RESULTS

The reorganization of local government in Winnipeg had very different results from those originally envisioned by the Provincial Government.⁸ The reason for the discrepancy was

7. See Lloyd Axworthy, ed., Future City: A Selection of Views on the Reorganization of Government in Greater Winnipeg, Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, 1972.

8. For a more extensive treatment of the first years of the new system in Winnipeg see Lloyd Axworthy, James Cassidy, Unicity: The Transition (Future City Report Number 4), Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, 1974.

was that legislators overestimated the impact that structural reform can have in altering the decision-making dynamics of a city and they vastly underestimated the importance of the political process.

This is not to say that some of the objectives of the unification were not achieved. Certainly from the outset the unified tax base eliminated the fiscal inequities that used to exist between municipalities. There have also been indications that the delivery of certain services benefited through a unified system. But, in the main, the structural changes had different and at times contradictory consequences from those envisioned and did not meet the goals set out in the Provincial Government's White Paper.

The Act did make provisions for the alterations by commissioning a provincial review committee with a mandate to make recommendations for changes by 1976. In 1977, amendments to the Act underscored the inability of local government to cope with the unintended effects of institutional restructuring. Essentially, the size of Council was reduced to twenty-seven, primarily through the urging of the City, and the planning provision of the Act was changed to give more central control. Although it would be premature to say the amendments to the Act indicated its

failure, they do imply that there were inherent difficulties in policy formulation and administrative processes.

SUBURBAN DOMINANCE

The reorganization of local government in Winnipeg brought about a consolidation of power into the hands of a very conservative, suburban, property-owner dominated coalition of political interests. People such as Jim Lorimer claim that the political system is irrelevant, that politicians are always in the hands of the property industry or some other economic elite.⁹ Yet, the fact remains that politicians must be elected by substantial numbers of voters. If voters elect representatives whose interests do not coincide with those of development firms and banks, then there is a competing system of power to that of the property industry.

One of the factors determining who gets elected and how they are elected is the electoral system which sets out boundaries, the franchise requirements and the procedures for selection. Equally influential is the organization base for election - whether there is a party system or a non-partisan system, and the financing of the candidates. Other factors intervene - the existence of certain key issues, the role of the media, the

9. Lorimer, op. cit.

impact of outside forces, such as federal and provincial governments. All these factors work together to determine the political alignments of a city. Those political alignments in turn play a major role in determining the policy and program output of a city. Thus the design and construction of institutional features of local government have a distinct influence in determining who exercises power in a city.

In Winnipeg, the reorganization altered the electoral and political arrangements of the city in such a way as to give advantage to those politicians who were elected from middle income suburban residential constituencies that were in favour of anything that would keep property taxes low, promote business growth, encourage transportation to the fringes, and generally favour policies and expenditures of benefit to single family homeowners. This happened in part simply because the amalgamation of suburbs to central city occurred at a time when the suburban population had substantially exceeded that of the central older city. The small ward system awarded the majority of seats to the suburban areas, or to the residential portions of the city which contained prosperous, single home families. The inner city areas were just simply outnumbered, and the political makeup of Council reflected this. One might consider how reform-minded Toronto City Council might be if it too were

unified and the majority of aldermen came from North York or Etobicoke.

Combined with this numerical advantage is the way in which the electoral system, especially the alteration to direct election of the mayor, worked against the build-up of an effective party system. The mayor ran solo, as did each of the councillors.

There was no requirement for a group to coalesce around a party label or a leader to present issues which might transcend the parochial economic or social interests of individual wards. In the words of the political scientists, there was no interest aggregation, at least outside of Council itself.

As a result, in the first election, a so-called non-partisan group, the Independent Civic Election Committee, swept the polls on nothing more than a platform of "good government" and "keep politics out of government." In effect what they were really signalling to the electorate was that their candidate was non-NDP, non-radical, and endorsed by an upstanding group of community leaders. The NDP ran on a party label but without much tangible support from the provincial party and with no attractive leader running for the office of mayor to articulate issues and attract swing support. They won only a handful of seats in traditional NDP strongholds in working-class areas.

There were also a few candidates elected independently on the strength of their own personalities.¹⁰

In the second civic election, held in the fall of 1974, the ICEC again won control of Council, again with no platform. The NDP managed to pick up a few seats. A new urban reform coalition that attacked the pro-development base of the ICEC ran several candidates, electing one and garnering 9% of the vote.¹¹ This reform group, like the NDP in the prior election, was handicapped because it did not run a mayoralty candidate who might have been able to focus on issues and generate some interest. This suggests that the parallel election of mayor and Council candidates, obviating the need to have a political group run on a common platform with a mayoralty candidate acting as chief spokesman, worked against the formation of strong, competing political groups. In turn, this meant that candidates ran primarily on appeal to specifically local ward level issues and gave advantage to local notables. With a stronger party system, a different kind of councillor might have been elected but a party system is difficult to form under such electoral rules.

10. Results of 1971 election: ICEC-37, NDP-7, Independents-5, Communist-1.

11. Results of 1974 election: ICEC-30, NDP-10, Independents-8, CRC-1, Communist-1.

Under this system, Mayor Juba achieved an unbeatable political position. In both elections his vote was overwhelming in all parts of the city. In the first election he ran against a respectable candidate, Jack Willis, former chairman of Metro, and in the second election he ran against three virtual unknowns and again won by a landslide.¹²

The nature of mayoralty election also influenced Juba's operating style as chief executive of the city. He had his own independent power base, and because of his political popularity he could intimidate other politicians who didn't want to be seen in his public disfavour. He didn't have to tailor his actions to be responsible to a majority on Council and often went off on personal tangents. He maintained a high political profile, usually through very colourful and flamboyant public relation ploys such as storming into the provincial legislature demanding that a public toilet not be built in one of the downtown parks as it would desecrate the memory of those war veterans for whom the park was named.

This role of the mayor was further isolated through changes to the Act brought in at the 1977 session of the Legislature. The

12. Mayoralty results: 1972 - Juba 139,174 -- Willis 49,014
1974 - Juba 109,225 -- Others 13,693.

mayor was still elected directly, and candidates could compete for a council seat and a majority at the same time. But, by legislation the mayor was removed as chairman of the city's Executive Policy Committee, the chief coordinating mechanism, and prevented from attending meetings of the chief administrative area, the Board of Commissioners.

These moves were widely interpreted as a way of undermining the position of Mayor Juba. In a surprise move, however, Juba withdrew from the race, leaving the field to two sitting councillors, Bill Norrie and Bob Steen. The winner was Steen and since taking office he has spent most of his time trying to gain or assert some authority against the ICEC dominated council.

The overall impact of the Mayor operation was, under the Unicity system, to add to the fragmentation of authority and the lack of cohesiveness in Council. As a result many decisions were taken on a "log-rolling", "you scratch my back" basis. This again contributed to a situation where individual councillors were susceptible to entreaties from individual interest groups, as they had little protection or responsibility to party discipline. And, it made for a disjointed and ad hoc system of decision-making. The only cohesion on Council came from the caucus arrangements of the different groups, particularly the ICEC

who usually voted en block for committee chairman and members of the Executive Policy Committee. But this was a very transitory unity.

As a result the decisions of Council had two distinct traits. One, they were random and capricious, with very little in the way of consistent policy direction. Secondly, they did reflect the bias of the constituency of the ICEC, which on local matters was quite conservative, very pro-development, and pro-suburban in turn.

POLICY CONSEQUENCES

The policy consequences of this political arrangement were not surprising. The new Winnipeg City Council without exception had a record of support and subsidy for big downtown development schemes. The most notable and oft criticized decision was that regarding the Trizec Corporation for the development of the famous corner of Portage and Main. The agreement was reached with Trizec in a matter of a very few weeks and committed the City to an expensive purchase and the building of a 1,200 stall carpark, in return for very limited and open-ended commitments from the developer to build a hotel and two office towers. By 1978 it was evident that the building would not materialize according to the

original plans.¹³

This pro-development bias was accompanied by distinct hostility to provisions under the new Act requiring environmental impact studies and a substantial degree of citizen involvement in decision-making. The City, for the first two years, didn't even fulfill the impact requirements and when forced to comply did so grudgingly and asked the Provincial Government to amend these provisions out of existence. In respect to citizen involvement, City Council neglected to discuss formally the role of citizens in the RAG, offered only limited financial support to the resident group, and persistently overturned the decisions of local community committees.

The inner city of Winnipeg in particular did not fare well by the new city organization, again in contradiction of the original expectation. Capital works expenditures between suburbs and inner city ran as high as 7-1 in favour of the suburban areas. Transportation decisions were made on the basis of how quickly people could move from the downtown to the suburbs with little consideration for the health of the older neighbourhoods through which the new traffic flows.

13. For a discussion of Trizec see David Walker - Unpublished Report, Institute of Urban Studies, Summer, 1978.

There have, however, been some bright spots. The city inaugurated innovations in transportation, including a Dial-a-bus system and a free downtown shuttle service, and it had plans for highspeed public transit routes.¹⁴ Work began on four neighbourhood improvement areas and there was some increased attention given to revamping the development plan. But measured against the kind of issues Winnipeg faced in terms of immigration of Native people, declining older neighbourhoods, serious fiscal problems, development of open space, and management of fringe development, the response of City government was not impressive.

ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRALIZATION

It would be wrong however to lay the blame entirely on the politicians. The reorganization of the City was supposed to bring a new, unified administrative system that would be more effective, efficient, better able to plan and decide. And, as the public service is a singular power centre in its own right and can wield very substantial weight in the making of policy decisions, whatever is happening in Winnipeg must reflect in large part the role of the civic administration.

14. The election of a new Conservative administration in the province brought about severe cutbacks resulting in the cancellation of the dual ad hoc system and the shelving of the high speed route.

At this stage the phasing in of completely unified services is complete, with fire and police protection being the last entrees in 1974. While the results of this unification are still difficult to fully ascertain at this time, certain propositions can be advanced. For example, overall the standard of service has not noticeably improved or declined as far as the average citizen is concerned.¹⁵

What can be concluded, though, is that the unification has been costly to the taxpayer. In a unified system, the standard of service must be roughly the same, and so must the standards of personnel qualifications and pay. Smaller municipalities that got along with limited services have now been upgraded and that costs money. The additional costs of local services are difficult to calculate, but it is conceded by the city administrators that the services cost more.

An even more disturbing occurrence than the increase in cost, however, was the high degree of centralization that has took place in the administration. Most local police, fire stations and civic offices were closed, contrary to the impression given when unification was proposed. The City was divided into six administrative

15. Ibid., p.38.

districts and one of the major complaints was that there was far less opportunity for the individual citizen to effect the operation of local services.

This centralization was accompanied by a high degree of bureaucratic "stone-walling". Civic administrators became notorious for not divulging information, for controlling the activity of junior members of departments in their public dealings and for refusing public access to information. At times the civic administration of Winnipeg gave the appearance of being defenders of a beleaguered fortress.

It is not apparent either that this high degree of centralization resulted in more effective planning or decision-making. One of the major criticisms of the new administrative regime was the delay in processing plans for subdivision and securing sufficient supplies of serviced land. As a result, Winnipeg began to suffer a serious housing shortage and a sharp escalation in housing costs. The building industry blamed city administration and the procedures under the Act for this.¹⁶ In fact the prime beneficiaries of the new centralized system appeared to be the large development firms.

16. See Underwood, McLellan, "Building Sites: A Prime Component of Housing", a report prepared for the Winnipeg House-builders Association, 1973.

These administrative problems arose from a continuation of factors. Some stemmed from the lack of strong political leadership and the natural inclination of hierarchical administrative systems to concentrate power. Some arose out of the design of the organization itself, wherein the Commission system of government tends toward overlap and concentration of authority in the hands of the chief officers of government. And some were a consequence of the hurried period of implementation.

The new Winnipeg system went through all of a six month transition period, with very little adequate preparation and orientation for administrators. This must be compared to the procedures followed in Great Britain where after passage of local government reform upwards of three years were prescribed for transition, combined with very extensive retraining of civil servants and careful construction of new internal organization structures.¹⁷

A consequence of the crash implementation was the limited attention paid to devising new management strategies or organizational procedures adequate to cope with a city of over half a million. The methods used by the police, fire, sanitation, public works departments were and still are basically the same as those employed before amalgamation. The only difference is that

17. See James Lang, Alan Norton, Op. Cit.

new people were grafted on. There were some new administrative wrinkles added, such as a Budget Bureau, but the overall method of City government remained quite old-fashioned.

It points out that a neglected area of reform for local government in Winnipeg was the development of up-to-date and effective management tools and procedures. Unification may have been a necessary first step to obtaining a modernization of city management, but it appeared to be the only step.

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Finally, what about the efforts under the City of Winnipeg Act to decentralize the political system and give private citizens greater involvement in their local government? The answer is that the regional system of thirteen community committees and resident advisory system played a useful but minor role in city government. In no way did they provide an effective counterweight to the centralized administrative system, and their influence on major Council decisions has been limited. Yet, in certain communities throughout the City, they served as forum for discussion of local issues; they provided an arena in which local activists could focus their energy and at times they succeeded in stopping decisions for zoning changes, roadways, or small local developments that would have been detrimental

to the community.

It is impossible in this study to cover all the facets of activity carried on by the community committee - RAG network. Certain salient observations can be made on their operation, however. First, most Winnipeggers were not even aware that the Community Committees or RAG's existed. In a survey conducted in 1973, less than 5% of citizens recalled ever having contact with the RAG's or Community Committees. The total number of citizens involved in the RAG groups numbered around four hundred, demonstrating that they had not become vehicles of widespread participation.¹⁸

In part, this weakness derived from the initial lack of support for the RAG's by local and provincial government for any efforts at conversation or reaching out into the community. Another reason, of course, was that most citizens had no reason to become involved. They were generally satisfied with basic services and were not motivated by more abstract issues of better planning, transportation, etc.

The RAG's and Community Committees therefore became the preserves of the local councillors, small groups of activist-minded citizens, and developers and builders who must appear in such

18. See "Meeting the Problems and Needs of Resident Advisory Groups", a report prepared by the Institute of Urban Studies for the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, March, 1973.

forums to gain a zoning variation or a subdivision approval. It is no coincidence, but the most active RAG groups have existed in older residential areas of the city which contained large numbers of students, professional people and political activists, and where the battleground over high-rise development, transportation throughways and community renewal were fought. The Community Committee-RAG system in the suburbs was moribund.

Out of the more centrally located RAG-Community Committees however came various initiatives at neighbourhood planning. Several resident organizations fighting for better housing, improved transportation were spawned. This put some pressure on the City which responded by assigning planners to the local groups to help develop district plans. This process is now taking place in three areas of the city and shows some potential of spreading.

On larger regional wide issues, the impact of the local decision-making units was far less successful. Early in 1972 the Community Committee-RAG's throughout the city were used by citizen groups to forestall City Council proposals on railway relocation. An alliance was formed between suburban and central city residents, each group acting out of different motives to oppose the plan, which had as its aim replacing the railways with freeways. Council

stopped the plan, and nothing has yet appeared as an alternative. In sum, however, the transmissions line of decision-making works from the centre outwards, and the impact of private citizens working through the RAG fell far short of original expectations.

In 1977, the Manitoba government substantially altered the Community Committee-RAG arrangement by greatly enlarging the population base. Because of the reduction in the size of Council down to twenty-seven, the Community Committees were reduced to six, serving a population base of 100,000 people. Thus, the idea of having small scale wards, relating to people on a relatively intimate basis has been eliminated. The notion of RAG's being drawn from local neighbourhood areas has also been eroded, as they now cover a much wider territory.

While it is too early to judge, the general expectation is that this will further diminish the quality of citizen involvement.

CONCLUSION

The story on Winnipeg's reform of local government is obviously incomplete. Many years will pass before the full implications of reorganization are perceived.

There may also be significant changes in the politics of Winnipeg. Public discontent with Council grew after Unicity, caused

primarily by the overt fumbling by Council of major issues, and an annual rise in property taxes of 20%. Splits occurred in the ICEC and two councillors who represented older city wards left the caucus claiming that there was discrimination in favour of the suburban areas.¹⁹ Rumblings were also heard of the need to form a coalition of non-ICEC supporters and back a common slate of candidates at the next election. So, it may be that several of the conditions described in this paper may eventually be corrected through the evolution of a different political mood and awareness, although at this stage skepticism of a successful political change is in order.

Whatever changes may be down the road, what has happened so far in Winnipeg is instructive about the kind of reform that emphasizes reorganization of boundaries and institutions as a solution to urban ailments.

A fair conclusion is that such reform does make a difference in the performance and operation of a city, but often the changes brought about are unintended and unforeseen. Certain direct connections between a specific change in structure and a specific

19. See Robert Matas, "Ghost of Metro Lingers on Council," The Winnipeg Tribune, November 9, 1974.

outcome can sometimes be well gauged. If you unify the tax base, there will be an elimination of disparities in the tax burden and a more equitable sharing of the cost of services. Also the competition between municipalities for industrial location is eliminated and there can be at least the preparation of a unified development plan.

On trickier ground, are efforts to change political outcomes by changing boundaries and electoral systems. One objective in the Winnipeg reorganization was to eliminate the squabbling between municipalities and Metro. The unintended result was to give a substantial political advantage to the suburban areas which has had a strong impact on the policies of the city. The cure may in this instance prove to be more severe than the original ailment.

The difficulty in local government reorganization is that provincial governments and especially provincial legislatures are not particularly adept at designing systems to achieve prescribed political outcomes. No one can say publicly that we want to give more influence to those who are friendly to our policy goals. Rather the goals of local government reorganization must be couched in terms of better planning, efficiency, overcoming fragmentation.

Furthermore, even if the design of reorganization was to obtain definite political outcomes, it is an uncertain and inexact activity at best. The alteration of political institutions can have a strong impact on rechanneling political forces and creating different sets of political advantages for groups in the community. But it is often hard to tell exactly what the outcomes will be because the variables affected are so varied and uncontrolled.

This suggests that reform of local government should perhaps address itself to more limited and selected goals, and be phased in over longer periods of time. It is questionable whether full-scale reorganization of local government into a regional system really produces such a substantial margin of demonstrable benefits to warrant all the time, efforts and resources that are required.

A more useful reform strategy in the area of institutional reform might be to target on very specific areas of change - the development of new channels of citizen involvement, modernization of urban management organizations, creation of innovative organizations for specific duties, i.e. urban development corporations, nationalization of urban fiscal arrangements and others. Along with that, a provincial government intent on promoting change within

a city might be better advised to adopt a strategy that would alter the power relationships in the community. Improving the economic well-being of disadvantaged groups, aiding in the organizing of unorganized groups, creating opportunities for community groups to assume responsibility for self-help activities, i.e. housing, health care, neighbourhood planning, thereby giving them a role and place in the community might be far more influential in changing the political performance of a city. But, of course, that also entails a changed situation for any politician at the provincial level, and they are as unlikely to support such moves as are city politicians, as it seems axiomatic that politicians prefer the devil you know rather than one that is unknown.

Reform of local government is a useful and sometimes necessary occupation. But, as the Winnipeg experience seems to demonstrate, it should proceed in more limited, cautious and careful fashion, devoid of the exaggerated expectations and claims that presently attach to reorganization proposals.